

Gold King Mine Release – New Mexico Response Activities

(August X, 2015) —

EPA Region 6 deployed a federal on-scene coordinator from its emergency response team and scientific technicians under contract to EPA to assist the state in preparations for the potential impacts from the Gold King Mine release in Colorado. The initial EPA arrived on-site late in the evening on August 6 and immediately on August 7 began to assist with collecting samples at the drinking water intakes for Farmington and Aztec to help New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) establish baseline conditions in the river. Additional EPA personnel arrived on-site in New Mexico on August 7 to assist with additional sampling preparations as the state prepares drinking water systems to return to operations after the release passes downstream.

EPA will participate in today's information meeting at the Farmington Civic Center exhibit hall at noon. EPA will also host a media conference call at 3 pm. Interested reporters can contact David Gray at gray.david@epa.gov.

EPA Region 6 is working closely with the NMED to evaluate possible impacts in New Mexico and providing technical and laboratory assistance. Potentially impacted water systems have been notified by State officials and precautions are in place to ensure drinking water in homes is protected. Each of the five drinking water systems are able to prepare and store drinking water in preparation for shut-down. NMED is providing direct assistance to community water systems and both agencies are closely monitoring the situation.

On August 5, 2015, EPA was conducting an investigation of the Gold King Mine. The intent of the investigation was to assess the on-going water releases from the mine and to treat mine water and to assess the feasibility of further mine remediation. The plan was to excavate the loose material that had collapsed into the cave entry back to the timbering. During the excavation, the loose material gave way, opening the adit (mine tunnel) and spilling the water stored behind the collapsed material into Cement Creek, a tributary of the Animas River.

Initial estimates are that the release contained approximately one million gallons of water (estimated from the dimensions of the mine adit) that was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal. There were several workers at the site at the time of the breach, all were unharmed.

The large pulse of water dissipated in about an hour. Today the water in Cement Creek and the Animas River in Silverton is clearing. The adit is still discharging lower flows into Cement Creek. Today, EPA is rebuilding settling ponds to treat these flows – the upper pond will be completed by early afternoon, and the lower pond by COB or early tomorrow. EPA will treat the mine water diverted to the ponds with caustic soda and flocculent once the ponds are built.

EPA Region 8 has been coordinating with Region 6 and Region 9 and the states of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Southern Ute Tribe and Navajo Nation.

For the latest information, photos, and the data when available, visit the [Gold King Mine Blowout Incident](#) page at the EPA On-Scene Coordinator site